"That which can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence."(Christopher Hitchens) Is this true?

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Without evidence a claim is relatively weak and has nothing to fall back on. This is true for most areas of knowledge, however not for all. Knowledge can be defined as having an explanation, an understanding or a reasoning of the areas of knowledge.[[1]](#footnote-1) This being said, all knowledge requires evidence to explain it, or to give an understanding of it. This is true for almost all areas of knowledge with the exception of religion as it is a question of faith. There is no generalized correct answer; however for the majority of the areas of knowledge, it is reasonable to apply Christopher Hitchens statement; "That which can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence."

In the natural sciences I will be focusing on mathematics as an example, nonetheless the evaluation of this area of knowledge can be applied to the other natural sciences. It is reasonable to say that any idea, theory or claim can be dismissed in the natural sciences if it is not backed up by evidence. Vise versa any claim backed up by evidence cannot be dismissed. This can be seen in the mathematics. Pythagoras (in the 6th century BCE) was the first person to prove that c2=a2+b2 must be true for all right-angled triangles. It is the fact that he proved the theory that makes it unquestionable. Pythagoras theorem is inevitably and indefinitely true. It has been mathematically proven and consequently it is reasonable to say it cannot be dismissed because it has substantial evidence backing it up. For this reason mathematics is known as “the sciences of rigorous proof”[[2]](#footnote-2). Using reason as a way of knowing it should be obvious to anyone that this knowledge is correct and cannot be questioned. Without evidence however claims can simply be dismissed in this area of knowledge because as a natural science these areas attempt to understand the world around us, without evidence there is no concrete understanding of the world. In Mathematics theories are established by using an axiom, it is a statement which can be assumed to be true, or is self evidently true. By then using deductive reasoning it is possible to arrive at a conclusion, if the axioms are correct and the logic is flawless then the conclusion will be undeniably valid and can be termed a theorem. This is where mathematics differs from the other natural sciences. Once a theorem is established it will forever be truthful. The other natural sciences are constantly progressing and theories can be truthful in their own context until new knowledge surrounding the theory is gained that might alter the validity of them, e.g. the progression of the understanding of atomic molecules.

The human sciences confront the human nature. This makes any claims made within this area of knowledge subjective to the human nature. Over time many theories, economic models, observations and so forth find themselves at a loss due to a change in the human nature. The perception of the human nature changes and there is no definite correct perception of it. Still, within a certain context certain laws, backed up by sufficient evidence can be seen as truthful. It involves inductive reasoning and predictive elements. In 1973 the economist Paul Ehrlich predicted that by 1990 65million Americans would be starved, in the context by which he made his prediction it was feasible. However due to a change in society since then his prediction turned out to be wrong. This means that the human sciences are ever changing. Still, through our observations we can establish the validity of certain patterns. This is done either through holism or reductionism; our observations allow us to conclude certain trends and laws. In economics for example the law of demand is largely accepted as being true, even to that extent that barely anyone attempts to make a case against it. The law states that ceteris paribus (all other things being equal) as a price for a good increases demand for that good will decrease and vise versa. This is not true for every good in the world and every consumer in the world. There are exceptions to the law, but ceteris paribus means that in economics, as in many human sciences the model is based upon a majority. It focuses on how the masses would react, simply to be applicable to the human nature. Here it is possible to dismiss a claim even with the presence of evidence. It depends on your perception. In history for example historic events are displayed differently depending on who is depicting them. Every individual has different factors influencing him. Culture, traditions, experiences, surroundings, intuition, all of these influence us and shape us into individuals. Consequently our views of the human sciences vary and are largely unpredictable.

Religion has two ways in which we can look at it. The first deals with reason and the second with morals and values. If we purely use reason to analyze religion we would very quickly come to the conclusion that religion is irrational. There is no concrete evidence of the existence of a deity or multiple deities. This would mean that all knowledge of religion can be dismissed. The problem with this is that religion requires faith, and faith requires ethics. It may be reasonable to dismiss religion but it is ethically wrong. Ethics can be defined as the moral principles that govern a person or group’s behavior.[[3]](#footnote-3) This being said, morals can be defined as “Principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behavior.”[[4]](#footnote-4) The problem with Ethics and morals is that they can be both relative and universal. Every individual might have his or her own moral values however the one moral value I will be focusing on, I see as universal, which is called ethical absolutism. It is a universal, and almost value to accept another person’s faith. In our world I believe it is largely, with the exceptions of a few individuals, seen as morally wrong to disprove of another person’s faith, no matter for which reason. This is relative at the same time as it has not always been that way. One quick look into human history will show how often wars have been fought in the name of religion. Nonetheless in the context of our present I strongly believe this has changed. In our society, even though it is largely goes against logic to believe in religion, it is still ethically wrong to disprove of another individual’s faith. Vise versa, it is also ethically wrong to force your own faith upon someone else. In essence everyone is entitled by morality to their own faith. Inevitably this concludes that all knowledge of religion can never be dismissed as long as someone in the world has faith in its truthfulness. Furthermore this means that no one has to have any faith, atheism has to be just as accepted as any religion because it deals with faith. Faith needs no evidence for it to exist and for a group or individuals to have it.

Christopher Hitchens would argue "That which can be asserted without evidence can be dismissed without evidence." At first I did not agree with this statement, however it seems to be applicable to most areas of knowledge, with the exception of religion. One could always still argue about whether it is rational to believe in a religion if there is no evidence for it. However in the context of our time faith does not have to be rational. That being said Christopher Hitchens statement is too generalized as it does not account for faith, which inevitably constitutes a major part of our society.

1. http://blogs.yis.ac.jp/13hwangj/tag/definition-knowledge-tok-ms-wilson/ [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Mr. Wilson xxxxx [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. xxxx [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [http://akastetter.blogspot.com/2012/04/tok-blog-11-morality.html 03.01.2013](http://akastetter.blogspot.com/2012/04/tok-blog-11-morality.html%2003.01.2013) ,10:56 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)